

Rossini – IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA

Opera's hits keep coming in BARBER - Proctor's Theatre

"The international mix worked fine on Thursday night at Proctor's Theatre in Schenectady where the Teatro Lirico D'Europa presented Rossini's classic comedy **THE BARBER OF SEVILLE**. The opera's most famous music and the best performance of the night came early on with "Largo al factotum," a tour de force aria overstuffed with running melodic lines and mouthfuls of words. Its la-la-la's and Figaro-Figaro Figaro's are a quintessential bit of opera, lampooned almost as often as a soprano in horns.

Baritone Vladimir Samsonov as Figaro belted out the proudly self-referential number with stunning accuracy and captivating bravado. As Samsonov's square and sturdy frame faced center stage, it was hard not to stare in amazement as his tongue bounced up and down within his huge opened mouth. Throughout the night each of the principal singers seemed to go for broke. That may be the only way to take on "Barber of Seville" since its music often spins and rattles as fast as a roulette wheel. By the end of the night, everybody was a winner. Tenor Benjamin Brecher as Count Almaviva had a more lyrical bent and made a nice contrast to Samsonov. The difference in their characters and styles was highlighted during a first act duet in which Almaviva floats along melody about love, while Figaro counts out imaginary money. There were lots of other ensemble bits that also

succeeded. Sometimes it was on a dramatic level, like near the end of act two, when all five principals crowded around a military captain trying to whisper in his ears at the same time. More often, it was the music that spoke, like during a lovely trio in act three. Soprano Viara Zhelezova played Rosina with girlish charm but sang the role with a mature and burnished voice. During her opening aria, it was as if the sound poured out of her whole body before filling the large house. The bass Viacheslav Pochapsky had a booming voice and looked like he stepped out of a "Monty Python" skit, with a boat-like hat and crazy gray hair. Baritone Hristo Sarafov, as Dr. Bartolo, was also good with physical humor as he got a shave from a distracted Figaro, the titular barber. The crowd: about 1,100 adults of all ages was attentive and appreciative."

ALBANY TIMES UNION – Joseph Dalton

Figaro, Figaro, Bravo! DAYTONA BEACH

"Daytona Beach Symphony Society ended up its season in the best way possible-with plenty of sincere applause, and delighted smiles everywhere. The reason was the nearly flawless Teatro Lirico D'Europa performance of **BARBER OF SEVILLE**. From the overture's happy notes, played by an orchestra that filled the pit and spilled over onto the sides of the stage, to the giddy, romantic resolution, **BARBER OF SEVILLE** was absolutely funny, lively and high spirited. As Rosina, Viara Zhelezova was perky and passionate, and in possession of a powerful, rich mezzo soprano that fit perfectly with the warm, clear tenor of Benjamin Brecher, an unusually

charismatic Count Almaviva. Baritone Hristo Sarafov was entertainingly foppish as Dr. Bartolo and Viacheslav Pochapsky, playing the venal Don Basilio, stunned with his booming bass. Most impressive however was the opera's central character, Figaro, the barber. Shon Sims was remarkable. It wasn't simply his strong resonant baritone, his acting skills and witty interpretation of the role were superb. Sims Figaro stood in the middle of all the action. Besides its atmospheric sets and lighting, what set Friday's performance apart was how the music was presented; with enormous verve and real joy by outstanding singers who were also accomplished actors."

DAYTONA BEACH NEWS-JOURNAL – Laura Stewart

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE - Palm Beach Gardens

"The best you can hope for is an opera without "singers." Give me a single well-oiled "machine" any day, not a bunch of singers who interact as if by accident. When individual singers disappear so deeply into their roles that there's no separating them from the scene they're building, THEN you've got opera! That happy circumstance existed Monday night with scintillating results in Rossini's comic **BARBER OF SEVILLE** at Eissey Campus Theatre. Monday night's cast worked with the precision and solidarity of a surgical team. The cast list explained a lot. Soloists of Teatro Lirico D'Europa. The production felt as comfortable as an old shoe. There was such agreement among soloists and fine musical grasp of the music that their detailed, vivid characterizations went well, beyond acting.

Figaro's famous aria won a full minute of applause but the consistently superior performances were from Sarafov (Barolo) and Zhelezova (Rosina). Every time the mezzo opened her mouth, lovely sound flooded the hall. She is not only up to Rossina's technical demands, she retained her luminous high notes and vocal control all evening. In her mannerisms she was every inch the rebellious hot tempered Spanish girl."

PALM BEACH POST – Sharon McDaniel

Teatro Lirico's BARBER brings a barrel of laughs - BOSTON

"Rossini's THE BARBER OF SEVILLE is a comedy so expertly carpentered that it can still make an audience laugh 189 years after its premier. It did so again last night at the Majestic Theatre, thanks to Teatro Lirico D'Europa. It's fun to hear accomplished singers leap over the vocal hurdles and watch them put their personal stamp on the famous comic scenes. Director Giorgio Lalov knows how to put all the traditional gags across, but also contributes some new ones of his own and lets the singers do what works for them. Benjamin Brecher as the Count is a witty and engaging actor and can actually sing rapid passagework that many other tenors smear. Shon Sims in the title role turned in some nimble vocalism and acting. He also played the guitar well enough to accompany Brecher in his serenade. Hristo Saraov offered a Dr. Bartolo whose dithering self-delusions because touching as well as amusing. The best singer was Viara Zhelezova, the Rosina. She has a lovely limber mezzo that she can move at warp speed, like Cecilia Bartoli. She's charming and musical.

Conductor Martin Mazik is very young and quite talented. There were many lively and elegant musical details. Constantine Videv as the venal music Master Don Basilo paid tribute to the audience by sporting a pair of bright red sox."

Richard Dyer – BOSTON GLOBE

A ROLLYING GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL AT BOSTON'S MAJESTIC

"Teatro Lirico D'Europa has delivered yet again, for Boston audiences, an entertaining evening of quality opera that is colorful, well sung and acted, and as professional as you will likely see anywhere else, here or abroad. The production took off and soared and drew the audience into the fun of what was occurring on stage. Everyone seemed to have a rollicking good time. Here, the ensemble cast seemed to genuinely enjoy the lighthearted opera that took Rossini only nineteen days to complete. What impressed most, however, was the fit between major roles and how well those roles were handled. The fusion of character to singer, singer to ensemble was smooth and natural and when accompanied by a supportive orchestra, as was done here, under the leadership of Martin Mazik, the performance was made thoroughly enjoyable on multiple levels. Credit has to go to Giorgio Lalov, for his adept stage direction. Fun! The characters here were so uniformly good and balanced in their presentations that it is impossible to single out any one. On the production side the sets and costumes by Vailntin Topencharov were traditional, colorful and realistic. The lighting by Boyukliev was

handled well and nicely creative lending to the overall effect of the performance and mood. In sum, Teatro Lirico d'Europa brought home the bacon once again for Boston audiences with a production of Rossini's "Il Barbiere de Siviglia" that was top notch, colorful, well sung, superbly acted and produced with an eye toward the effect it had on an appreciative audience. What more can one ask for?"

OPERAONLINE.US – Paul Walkowski

Comedy tonight! Teatro Lirico's Rossini (BARBER OF SEVILLE)

"Teatro Lirico d'Europa, the irresistible touring company returned to the Majestic for two familiar works in traditional style. Last January, Teatro Lirico provided one of the year's best opera experiences, a single performance of Rossini's beloved **BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA**. It's one of opera's most delicious scores, including the tingling overture and perhaps the most famous moment in all opera, Figaro's entrance aria, the "Largo al factotum" ("Figaro! Figaro!"). "For abundance of ideas, for comic verve, and for truth of declamation," Verdi wrote, "- the most beautiful opera buffa in existence."

What impressed me most was the extraordinary sense of ensemble. That's what happens when a group of performers play together night after night-or should happen. And these singers are full of play. The shtiks and routines seem anything but routine, as if the performers were living through these events for the very first time. This is obviously the spirit that artistic director and stage director Giorgio Lalov seems to inspire. This season's new Figaro, American baritone

Shon Sims delivered directly to the audience his rapid-fire patter in the "Largo" with tip-of-the-tongue fluency. For a moment I thought he was too full of himself. Last year's Figaro was more appropriately beleaguered by the overwhelming demands on his talent ("Figaro here! Figaro there! Figaro up! Figaro down!"). But Sims soon made Figaro's inventiveness, and impatience with others' foolishness, part of a rounded characterization. You were always on his side. An Alec Baldwin look-alike, he's younger and better-looking than most Figaros, with an attractive ringing tone to match. Also new to Boston was American tenor Benjamin Brecher, from the New York City Opera, who-as the amorous Count Almaviva-seems at ease in both slapstick comedy (Almaviva disguises himself both as a drunken soldier and a simpering music teacher) and matinee-idol lyricism. The other newcomer was Bulgarian bass Constantine Videv as the scandal-mongering music teacher Don Basilio, who sang the great "Calumny" aria with cavernous torture-chamber resonance.

The others were as good as ever. Bulgarian mezzo Viara Zhelezova's lustrous voice is as mobile as her face, not just singing the brilliant roulades of her own big introductory aria ("Una voce poco fa"), but filling each run and trill with character and innuendo ("I'm docile, obedient, I can be guided, BUT!... cross me, and I'm a viper!"). Bulgarian baritone Hristo Sarafov was once again a Bartolo who's as touching as he's buffoonish. In the small role of Berta the Housekeeper, mezzo Ana Petrova used her rich voice to delightful effect. One of Rossini's targets is opera itself. The lovers don't elope

in time because, over Figaro's protests, they must sing a love duet. Lalov's presentational style-characters addressing the audience directly or in teasing asides-is exactly right! Young conductor Martin Mazik, led rather than followed the singers. The orchestra seemed like one of the characters: exploding and whispering, teasing and tickling, leering and caressing."

BOSTON PHOENIX – Lloyd Schwartz

BARBER OF SEVILLE delights Audience! (Touhill Perf. Arts Center)

"**THE BARBER OF SEVILLE** was presented by Teatro Lirico D'Europa on Friday, February 18 at the Blanche M. Touhill Performing Arts center at UM-St. Louis. The company was in fine voice and full comic form, and the performance delighted the packed house. The opera singers were excellent. When baritone Vladimir Samsonov took the stage in the title role of FIGARO and performed that famous "Figaro, Figaro" aria with booming bravura and comic vocal flourishes, the audience response was so overwhelming and the applause so thunderous and sustained that the star was compelled to quiet the audience just so the opera could continue. It was a very good start to an artistically excellent performance by the whole troupe." *THE CURRENT – Catherine Marquis-Homeyer*

BARBER OF SEVILLE Sparkles at the Vet! - Providence, RI

"Teatro Lirico D'Europa gave a sparkling rendition of Rossini's **BARBER OF SEVILLE** last night at Veteran's Memorial Auditorium with some funny touches and dazzling vocal pyrotechnics. This was

especially true of soprano Viara Zhelezova, the feisty Rosina whose ornate fioratura passages were thrilling. Teatro Lirico has been known for consistent productions that are a cut above the companies that have come here in the past. Last night's BARBER was not only well sung, but well acted, with handsome singers who moved well on the set. Vladimir Samsonov was a hoot as Figaro. The staging was lively and imaginative."

PROVIDENCE JOURNAL – Channing Gray

Teatro Lirico's Classical BARBER a Cut Above!

"The little touring company that could began its annual, much anticipated visit to town Thursday night at the Cutler Majestic Theatre with a solid engaging performance of Rossini's comedy **THE BARBER OF SEVILLE**. Baritone Vladimir Samsonov's Figaro was generous of personality and winningly sturdy of voice. Bernardini relaxed into a fine performance (Almaviva) as his voice gained in beauty and suppleness. Zhelezova's supple, finely modulated, silky smooth sound caressed the ear, and her portrayal of the feisty young woman (Rosina) was spot on. And Sarafov was the kind of Bartolo who really sings instead of bluffing his way through the part. As ever with Lalov, the company's artistic director, this was truly a production of Rossini's opera, not a director's idea of what that opera should be." *BOSTON HERALD – T.J. Medrek*

Teatro Lirico Returns to Boston with Sparkling **BARBER!**

"It's official. Boston really loves Teatro Lirico D'Europa. The Majestic was at near capacity for the single performance of Rossini's **IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA**. Rossini demands phenomenal vocal and verbal dexterity from the entire ensemble – and great comic timing. Those were exactly what Teatro Lirico brought. It may have been the best production of this familiar opera I've ever seen. This was very much a cast-centered enterprise. Artistic director Giorgio Lalov is a conventional, ungimmicky stage director--but there was always a point. The audience was laughing at all the jokes because the action was always clear and followable. Here was a perfect example of a cast working together. Each character related to each of the others. They knew each other and felt comfortable with each other. And they were all good! Figaro was the engaging young Russian baritone Samsonov, who has sung with the Bolshoi Opera and Marinsky Theatre. He was truly the center of this production, commanding the stage with his wit and charm. His Italian diction was first rate and he has a refined and ringing tone--burnished copper. He used his voice to bravura effect. Rosina was Bulgarian mezzo-soprano Viara Zhelezova. Zhelezova, with her long dark hair and sly smile, is more like a Bulgarian Julia Louis-Dreyfus, with equally impeccable comic timing, who has the luminous voice and dazzling coloratura of Cecilia Bartoli. I don't know why she is not a major star. Almaviva was American tenor Don Bernardini. His strong, focused tone became an impressive instrument and he too used his body to comic

effect. Senior Bulgarian baritone, Hristo Sarafov must have played the frustrated Dr. Bartolo his entire professional life. He was a model of good technique and appropriate buffo style. In the role of Don Basilio, sonorous Russian bass Viacheslav Pochapsky, Teatro Lirico's profoundly moving Boris Godounov 2 years ago, was hilarious. The singers maintained a lively pace, and there was never a dull moment. The sets--a Sevillian street scene and the interior of Bartolo's house were attractively cartoonish. Too bad there was only one performance!" *BOSTON PHOENIX – Lloyd Schwartz*

BARBER OF SEVILLE IS A GEM! Portland, ME BARBIERE

"Teatro Lirico D'Europa's production of **BARBER OF SEVILLE** is a wonderful, bawdy romp through one of the world's favorite operas. PCA Performances is to be thanked for bringing this lively lyrical performance to Merrill Auditorium. The comedic action is first rate with a lot of laugh out loud action. Don Basilio as sung by bass Viacheslav Pochapsky is one of the jewels of the production with a wonderful bass voice and sense of humor just as deep. Hristo Sarafov is an ideal Bartolo. Vladimir Samsonov has the voice and energy to bring the barber alive. Viara Zhelezova plays the vivacious Rosina as if born to the part."

PORTLAND PRESS HERALD – Christopher Hyde

McCain 'Barber' one of the best ever - Manhattan, KS

“Aboard Teatro Lirico D'Europa's chartered bus, in company with his collegial troupe of fellow roving players, Rossini's justly celebrated **BARBER OF SEVILLE** arrived in Manhattan this past Friday to delight a sizable McCain crowd with two and a half hours of dazzling musical artistry and equally adept comic acting. I've been to quite a number of Barbers over the years, many of them exceptionally well done. But in all honesty I can't remember ever enjoying (emphasis on "joy") any *Barbiere de Seville* more than this one. I don't expect that Miller's elaborately whimsical sets for the ENO will be topped, and the Merrill-Peters collaboration was pure gold, but on balance Teatro Lirico's is the finest overall mounting I can recall. Extravagant praise? True enough. Excessive? Hardly. I'm only just trying to keep up with the talent. First the voices. Rossini wrote great arias and ensembles for this opera, but nearly all of them demand bravura coloratura. Usually only one or two of the leads really copes very effectively at speed. In this cast, Figaro himself (Shon Sims), Rosina (Viara Zhelezova), Almaviva (Benjamin Brecher) and Bartolo (Hristo Sarafov) were all racing demons, articulating rapid-fire strings of notes with a bright distinctness and dead-on precision of delivery that made a listener's pre-Valentine's Day heart race. Add to their nimbleness that all these voices also had charm of tone and timbre, size and range, expressive energy, and interpretive flexibility, and you have an imposing core of four. Add to them a wonderfully lugubrious, mendacious, malignant Basiglio (Mikhail Kolelishvili)

and Rumiana Petrova's Berta, the poor level-headed serving maid stuck in the middle of a madhouse caper, and the supply of vocal capacity is rich indeed. Then there's the non-vocal part of the job, otherwise known as acting. In olden times we didn't expect singers to do much multi-tasking. If they sang well, that was good enough. Nowadays we hope, even expect, that our singers should fit and fill – without overflowing – their roles. Our program contained no acting coach credit, and Artistic/Stage Director Giorgio Lalov can't have taken that task on himself, but somebody has turned a bunch of brilliant opera singers into brilliant bunch of sitcom actors, replete with mugs, winks, nudges, kicks, leaps, staggers, and every other requisite farcical move. The level of across-the-board singing plus acting skills was a marvel to behold. And did I mention the splendid set (how many touring companies are willing to hire three moving vans to carry their decor?), the sumptuous costumes, the lighting? Or the fact that we had a real, live thirty-piece orchestra in the pit that, under the baton of maestro Krassimir Topolov, managed its own "coloratura" bits, as well as those delicious Rossini crescendos, with the same dexterity and vigor as those on stage? There's just too much about this wonderful evening to recap in a single column. What a blast. Enough to heat the whole outdoors."

Ben Nyberg – MANHATTAN MERCURY NEWS

BARBER OF SEVILLE in Wilkes-Barre, PA

"I want to thank you and your company for a wonderful performance last night. Everyone I spoke with had nothing but

praise for the performers, orchestra and production. People left our theater with a smile on their face knowing they watched a truly professional opera company. Our Box Office manager commented to me this morning that this was without a doubt the best opera the company has ever done, and she has seen them all. Thanks to you and your husband for a wonderful engagement.”

*Mark Thomas, Director of Programming
F.M. Kirby Center, Wilkes Barre, PA*

BARBER in Bethlehem, PA

“Thank you very much for facilitating the engagement of Teatro Lirico at Lehigh University. The production of "Barber of Seville" was wonderful. The quality of the singers was exceptionally fine. I particularly enjoyed the performances of James Bobick, Viara Zhelezova and certainly Mikhail Kolelishvili. In addition to having remarkable vocal instruments they also brought well-developed acting talent to the stage. That's a very happy combination in any opera performance. I would also like to comment on Martin Mazik, whose skill and talent as a musician and a leader of the ensembles solidly founded and moved the production. The audience was pleased and happy.”

*Deborah Sakarakis – Zollener Performing Arts Center
Bethlehem, PA*

BARBER OF SEVILLE in SPRINGFIELD, MO

“The show was wonderful, Jenny...we were all quite pleased with the production...and especially liked your new Figaro! Lots of good voices, nice acting and a real spirit of fun in the show! The audience response, both during the performance and at the end, was enthusiastic. And Anjie said Giorgio’s master class was great! Looking forward to next season...hope your holidays are wonderful.” *Deb Gallion, Director of Marketing and Promotions*
Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts – Springfield, MO

BARBER – Paramount Theatre, Charlottesville, VA

It was lovely. I was in NYC but I made sure to get a full report and staff and audience both loved it. Let’s keep on the books for next season.”

Matthew Simon – The Paramount Theater – Charlottesville, VA

Zoellner Performing Arts Center – Lehigh University

“I wanted to stop for a moment and thank you for your help this past season. The 2007-2008 GUEST ARTIST SERIES was one of the strongest, culturally diverse and artistically innovative seasons that I have been privileged to present. Teatro Lirico D’Europa’s production of the BARBER OF SEVILLE was integral to the overall quality of the season and I greatly appreciate your efforts in bringing that program to Lehigh. Please extend my sincere thanks to the company. The

positive feedback that I have received from our audience indicates to me that we are doing something right and I look forward to continuing our valued collaboration for many more successful seasons.”

*Deborah Sacarakis, Director of Programs and Outreach
Zoellner Perf. Arts Center*

NAPLES, FL BARBER

“We enjoyed a wonderful evening in Naples at the performance of BARBER OF SEVILLE. Figaro stole the show in the early part of the performance. It was a performance you should be very proud of and I hope we can arrange to have your company perform on our series in 2010-11. We thank you very, very much for arranging for the tickets. We had great seats in the fourth row center section. The Philharmonic is a very impressive facility. I am anxious to tell my talent committee and executive board about the performance.”

*Roger Bintz, General Manager – Brown County Civic Music
Green Bay, WI*

*(on attending performance at Philharmonic Center for the Arts.
Naples, FL)*

DAYTONA BEACH BARBER

"The **BARBER OF SEVILLE** was a big success. Everyone enjoyed the evening and were VERY impressed by the quality of the singers. We also appreciate the extra effort you made to provide entertainment at our fundraising dinner party before the opera. Everyone loved it and

felt very special! Thanks so much for sending us another great opera."

Carol Anderson McLean, Ph.D. – Daytona Symphony Society

DAYTONA BEACH BARBER

"Dallas was so stimulated by your brilliant **BARBER OF SEVILLE** production that he couldn't sleep. He came home raving about the beauty and technique of the singers, and the success of the whole evening. Thank You, Jenny and Giorgio "

*Nancy and Dallas Weekly – Daytona Symphony Society
Peabody Auditorium*

OPERA NEW HAMPSHIRE BARBER

"What a successful event (**THE BARBER OF SEVILLE**)! The audience truly enjoyed the show! I heard so much laughter in the seats. The entire cast was exuberant in their roles, which made the storyline very enjoyable. The acting was wonderful and engaging. At one point, a patron's phone went off during the show. Tenor, Fabian Robles (Almaviva) incorporated a reaction to the phone ringing into the part on stage – it was terrific! Thank you so much to all the Teatro Lirico D'Euorpa – it was another fabulous opera performance."

*Jean Esslinger, President, Board of Directors – Opera New Hampshire
Presenter of Teatro Lirico at Palace Theatre, Manchester, NH*

"**THE BARBER OF SEVILLE** was fabulous. It was wonderful to see the younger crowd in the house. Thanks so much for everything.

Your artists and crew are so professional and a pleasure to work with."

*Faith A. Wilson, Executive Director, Opera New Hampshire
Presenter of Teatro Lirico at Palace Theatre, Manchester,*

LANDSDALE, PA BARBER

"The production of THE BARBER OF SEVILLE this past Saturday evening was just fantastic! Our audience gave them a rousing ovation with numerous curtain calls. The singers were outstanding, costumes exquisite and the orchestra was tremendous. Many of our members commented about the quality of the production including a special emphasis on the musicianship of the orchestra. It was a very cold evening, however it didn't seem to affect our attendance. We had a full house! We were indeed very pleased with the performance!"

*Don Souder, President – Lansdale Community Concerts Inc.
Lansdale, PA*

Teatro's Barber Scores Big at the Naples Phil

"A good production of THE BARBER OF SEVILLE is a laugh a minute. The production at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts was one of opera's best advertisements, full of quirky personalities, a welcome happy ending and bel canto – literally, beautiful singing – arias, Yet it's grueling work. A successful production demands broad personality portrayal, agile vocals and orchestral flexibility. This production, at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts, was a credit to the composer. This was one of the happiest evenings an opera lover could have spent on the town in Naples."

NAPLES, FLORIDA DAILY NEWS – Harriet Howard Heithaus